

Distell develops Centre of Excellence to drive quality

By **Wendy Morley** on May, 3 2016 | Spirits & Tobacco



South African liquor group Distell has created a new department that will focus on the intrinsic quality of its products across the range of wines, spirits, ciders and other ready-to-drinks.

Led by Johan Venter, a celebrated brandy master internationally recognised for his contribution to South African brandy, the Centre of Excellence: Intrinsic will provide strategic guidance to the production arm of the company. It will also be responsible for maintaining excellence in farm management and viticulture and play a crucial role in building and expanding the company's luxury and craft portfolio. The centre forms part of the company's supply chain function, directed by Schalk Klopper.

Venter said that with the company's growing international profile and its rising participation in fiercely contested developing and developed markets, it was essential that Distell not only maintain but

augment its established quality credentials by remaining at the forefront of skills development and technology.

Among those reporting to Venter are Razvan Macici, who was Nederburg's cellar master for 15 vintages and who built the winery's current international profile with a string of accolades and awards. As Distell's head winemaker, his focus is to highlight style and innovation in a way that is aligned with the company's strategy.

Working closely with him is viticulturist Drikus Heyns, who is responsible for all the company's own farms, its jointly-owned farms and the technical services that embrace wine, grape and apple supply.

Master distiller Andy Watts, who has won a succession of global whisky awards, will focus on the company's whisky portfolio, including all its Scottish brands, such as Bunnahabhain, Deanston, Tobermory, Black Bottle and Scottish Leader.

Mare-Loe Prinsloo will be responsible for Distell's award-winning brandy and Cognac portfolio as well as all other spirits apart from whisky. Among the brands involved are Van Ryn's, the country's most decorated name in brandy, the heritage house of Bisquit, as well as Oude Meester, Klipdrift and Richelieu.

Charles Osborne is responsible for the cider portfolio, and has been involved in innovation and experimental research for the company's products. Hunter's is the world's number two cider brand and Savanna, the sixth, making Distell one of the biggest players in global cider.